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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a list of questions to help teachers and administrators determine whether initial plans for gifted and talented services are actually aligned with the program implementation. Questions focus on students, curriculum, program implementation, and service delivery and relate to: (1) identification and services provided to gifted and talented students; (2) available data indicating effectiveness of the screening and identification system; (3) additional screening and identification criteria used to ensure that special populations are not being overlooked; (4) curricular options available to meet students' academic needs; (5) available data indicating the effectiveness of the curriculum; (6) the use of acceleration; (7) effectiveness of acceleration options; (8) implementation of program goals and objectives; (9) connection of program goals and objectives to the district's mission and philosophy statements; (10) impact of the programs and services on the regular education program; (11) available advanced training opportunities for all teachers; (12) the use of formal and informal feedback to improve program quality; (13) educational outcomes of students involved in the program; (14) implementation of curriculum approaches at various grade levels; and (15) available evidence illustrating the merit of present service delivery models. The paper also suggests strategies for data collection. (CR)

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NRC/GT's Suggestions: Evaluating Your Programs and Services

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It's that time of the year when all of our day-to-day reflections on the programs and services for gifted and talented students are put into perspective. You reflect on your students' accomplishments and the extent to which the programs and services met your expectations. Informal or formal evaluations of special programs and services for gifted and talented students require considerable planning. Whether your district's program is relatively new or fully established, it is important to revisit why you developed specific programs and services and to determine how these programs and services promote high-end learning opportunities.

The impetus for developing challenging learning environments for all students is usually implicit in mission and philosophy statements proposed by districts. These statements provide the rationale for developing defensible programs and services for gifted and talented students. As you review your school year, convene a group of educators, parents, and recent graduates with first-hand experiences to consider the following questions:

Why do we need special programs and services for gifted and talented students?
How are the programs and services extensions of the regular education program?
How are the programs and services differentiated from the regular education program?
How do the programs and services affect the educational experiences of all students?

Do you have a defensible response to each question? Do you need to revise your program philosophy, goals, and objectives? Are these statements of purpose thoroughly understood by educators, parents, and students? The philosophy, goals, and objectives should document what is to be accomplished and how it is to be accomplished. If you pose questions about what you are doing and how you are doing it, you are taking the first step in framing a program evaluation. The evaluation of programs and services becomes a process of reviewing what has been done, determining its effectiveness, generating options for making improvements, and deciding on the most appropriate course of action.

The following sample of what and how questions can help you determine whether your initial

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plans for programs and services are actually aligned with the program implementation. These draft questions, focusing on students, curriculum, program implementation, and service delivery model, need to be tailored to your district's needs.

Focus on Students

How are gifted and talented students identified and served?
What existing data confirm the effectiveness of the screening and identification system?
What additional screening and identification criteria need to be considered to ensure that special populations are not being overlooked?
What academic and behavioral characteristics differentiate gifted and talented students from regular education students?
How is the program meeting the academic, artistic, affective, and counseling needs of individual students?
How can program activities be used with all students to spot latent interests and talents?

Focus on Curriculum

What curricular options are available to meet the students' academic needs?
What data indicate the effectiveness of the curriculum?
How is acceleration used in specific content areas?
What is the effectiveness of the acceleration options?
What is the impact of training in the arts?
What units of study are developed to challenge students' abilities?
How are advanced research skills introduced and applied by students?
What is the quality of students' projects as a result of their program involvement?
What new skills do students acquire due to their program involvement?
How are the new skills being applied to other curricular areas?

Focus on Program Implementation

How are the program goals and objectives implemented?
What program goals and objectives need to be clarified?
How are the program goals and objectives connected to the district's mission and philosophy statements?
What is the impact of the programs and services on the regular education program?
What is the effectiveness of the gifted and talented programs and services?
What advanced training opportunities are available for all teachers?
What are the unanticipated outcomes of the program?
What are the reactions of students, parents, teachers, and administrators to the program implementation?
How are formal and informal feedback used to improve program quality?
How well do the instructional staff perform their tasks and demonstrate continual professional growth?
What instructional strategies and curricular techniques are applied to the regular education

program?
What are the educational outcomes of students involved in the program?
What are the long-term effects of student involvement with the program?

Focus on Service Delivery Models

How are the curriculum approaches being implemented at various grade levels?
How is the program organized and coordinated?
How is the program implementation documented?
What program resources are needed to maintain or improve the quality of the present program?
What evidence has been gathered to judge the merit of present service delivery models?
What additional service delivery models should be considered?

Questions, such as those above, based on students, curriculum, program implementation, and service delivery models, can be expanded to include other areas of interest or concern. You can customize questions based on the comprehensiveness of your programs and services. Consider establishing a program review committee to generate additional questions.

Once the program committee generates or modifies questions, data collection strategies need to be considered. Numerous data collection strategies are available. Strategies are limited by the amount of time that is needed to answer pertinent questions, the personnel required to process the information, and the resources needed to interpret the collected information. It is important to consider the alignment between each evaluation question and the process used to secure the information. The selected data collection strategies should maximize the opportunity to secure program information that will provide guidance for program changes as warranted. Data collection strategies might include:

interviews
questionnaires, rating scales
logs, journals, anecdotal records
program records, documents
formal observation data
students' products
satisfaction/reaction data
individual student reports
test scores
portfolios

The evaluation questions and data collection strategies direct data analyses techniques. The range of techniques may include descriptive analyses of information from interviews, logs, journals, and observations or statistical analyses of numerical data. The level of sophistication of data analyses techniques is once again dependent on the human, material, and financial resources available for the evaluation.

Evaluation strategies should be an integral part of program planning and implementation. Throughout all stages of the programs and services the evaluation strategies will lead to decisions to advance program quality and effectiveness. Moving evaluation questions and strategies from a year-end process to an on-going plan will continually make your programs and services for gifted and talented students responsive to their needs and to the district's mission and philosophy. If you don't currently have a comprehensive evaluation plan in place, it is time to reflect on programs and services and seek answers to:

What works?
What needs improvement?
How will possible changes in programs and services improve the educational options for students?